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ABSTRACT

This booklet, issued by the Summer Scholars Transfer Institute (SSTI), encourages collaboration in promoting access and achievement in the education of under-represented students at urban community colleges. SSTI is an eleven-day residential program for community college students held at the University of California, Irvine campus. It is designed to take low-income, predominantly Latino and African-American community college students who, in the past, have rarely continued their education, and prepare them for admission to the University of California system. Now in its fifth year, the program serves approximately 150 students each summer. To be considered for admission students must have a 2.0 GPA, must have taken more than 30 units, and must be eligible for Freshman Composition. Included in this explanatory pamphlet are the following sections: (1) Introduction to SSTI; (2) Voices from the Institute; (3) A Learning Organization; (4) The Students; (5) The Classroom Experience; (6) Role of the Classroom Teacher: Promoting Transformation; (7) Role of the Counselor: Emotional Center of the Classroom; (8) Role of the Teaching Assistant: Bridge between Students and Staff; (9) The Student Experience; (10) Spinoffs and Unintended Consequences; (11) Lessons Learned; and (12) A Note on Method. (AS)

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR URBAN PARTNERSHIPS

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## *YES, IT CAN BE DONE*

### The Summer Scholars Transfer Institute: Collaborating to Promote Access and Achievement

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# Sí, Se Puede

## *Yes, It Can Be Done*

The Summer Scholars Transfer Institute:
Collaborating to Promote Access and Achievement

4

Dennis McGrath • William Van Buskirk

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# Table of Contents


Preface ..... 1

Introduction ..... 4

Voices from the Institute ..... 6

A Learning Organization ..... 7

The Students ..... 9

The Classroom Experience ..... 12

Role of the Classroom Teacher:
Promoting Transformation ..... 12

Role of the Counselor:
Emotional Center of the Classroom ..... 17

Role of the teaching Assistant:
Bridge Between Students and Staff ..... 23

The Student Experience ..... 27

Spinoffs and Unintended Consequences ..... 32

Lessons Learned ..... 41

A Note on Method ..... 44

# Preface

At this moment, as I write, Maria is filling out staff expense vouchers, overseeing the duplication of materials for a booklet, and generally providing competent, cheerful help as the Center's senior student aide. Five years ago Maria came to the States from the Dominican Republic with a husband, three children and not much English. Now, with a growing family and expanded vocabulary, Maria works as determinedly in the classroom as she does in our office. But children and a monolingual husband have taken their toll. Last term Maria's GPA dipped from 3.4 to 3.1. She is electing another English course this winter to bolster her language and writing skills, positioning herself, she hopes, for transfer to a four-year college. Her husband, while generally supportive, would just as soon that Maria finish her A.S. and then get a job.

There are many students like Maria in today's urban community colleges, and they need a boost. At the Center, we coordinate the work of the Urban Partnership Program (UPP), founded on K-16 collaboration, to help prepare underserved students from 16 cities for baccalaureate-level work. Like many educational reform efforts, UPP teams have concluded that investing in the young is likely to produce the most long-term dividends. Therefore, UPP's university- and community college-based teams frequently address their goal by focussing on primary and middle schools. They promote conversations among teachers from different systems that lead to coordinated courses from one school to another, as well as dialogues about teaching that lead to more consistent classroom practices—the kinds of collaboration discussed in Dennis McGrath and William Van Buskirk's study of Newark teachers, *Start with the Faculty*, the first monograph in this series.

But what about Maria? What about the students already in the pipeline, students who, often against enormous challenges, are succeeding at two-year colleges and now face the decision of what to do next. Some are not fully aware of the benefits of baccalaureate

degrees, or how to access information about specific programs. Others are not confident that they can succeed at the next level. If they are women and first-generation college students, as most of them will be, there are additional challenges. Like Maria, family and work will inevitably compete for more time and attention. In the confusion and frustration, often it is easier to finish the immediate task at hand and then stop. Or just stop.

Under the auspices of Santa Ana Networks, faculty and administrators at Santa Ana College, several Los Angeles community colleges and the University of California, Irvine have designed the Summer Scholars Transfer Initiative, a dramatic intervention into the lives of capable, undecided community college students willing to undertake a bold residential experiment. SSTI staff have created an 11-day collegial experience with ample direction and support. They have recruited some of the best teachers from their campuses, literally moved their counselling programs to the Irvine campus, and brought back some of the best graduates from previous programs.

With faculty, counselors and teaching assistants as vital parts of newly-formed learning communities, SSTI students tackle challenging university courses. By passing English literature or Oceanography in a severely truncated time period, students not only receive credit, but emerge with heightened self-confidence and renewed determination. As McGrath and Van Buskirk note:

*The experience of the Institute reaches deep into students' sense of the possibilities of their lives, their hopes and dreams for the future. The ability of the program to affect both mind and heart is vital, and helps everyone involved better understand what is required to truly promote educational access for underserved, nontraditional students.*

SSTI students have done well in this program and done well subsequently. Santa Ana College, for example, has doubled the number of underserved students transferring to the University of California. McGrath and Van Buskirk examine this phenomenon closely. They have interviewed students who have been spirited away into this new world, a world stuffed with advantages that maximize their interests and talents and offset their disadvantages.

McGrath and Van Buskirk interview SSTI faculty who are as intrigued by the implications for the sponsoring institutions as they are

committed to the summer program. What follow-up support can an institution offer SSTI students? Which SSTI principles can be incorporated into regular community college courses and support services? What are the implications of the learning communities, so much at the heart of the SSTI? How can SSTI experiences guide planners adapting SSTI for high school students?

Anyone skeptical about the possibility of systemic change, or changing an institutional culture, will be heartened by this report. Team teaching has emerged as a major force at Santa Ana College, and SSTI has helped prompt the Freshman Experience Program, which now touches all Santa Ana College first-year students. McGrath and Van Buskirk note how faculty within Santa Ana College and the participating Los Angeles community colleges have come to support their SSTI colleagues and how they now better appreciate the talents and determination of their students. Across the freeways, at the University of California, Irvine, an increasing number of faculty and administrators testify to the dynamic work of their sister institutions. As a result of this collaboration, hundreds of community college students in southern California attain new levels of achievement each year and serve as role models for classmates watching their progress with interest and hope.

Richard A. Donovan
Director, National Center for Urban Partnerships

# Introduction

The Summer Scholars Transfer Institute (SSTI) is an important model for educators and policy makers concerned with developing new approaches to access for underrepresented students. In the face of the dismantling of traditional affirmative action programs by the University of California, among other state systems, many lessons can be learned from examining this powerful and successful program for underserved at-risk students. SSTI demonstrates the power of a strategically timed intervention. An examination of its programmatic features discloses how a rich and stimulating academic environment, coupled with well-integrated student supports, can dramatically improve the eligibility and participation of underrepresented students in even the most competitive university system. Further, SSTI provides important lessons for those concerned with institutional collaboration. It illustrates how a diverse set of institutions can learn to work together to develop and institutionalize a successful program to promote educational access and academic achievement.

SSTI is an eleven day residential program for community college students held at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) campus. It is designed to take low-income, predominantly Latino and African-American community college students who, in the past, have rarely continued their education, and prepare them for admission to the University of California system. Now in its fifth year, the program serves approximately 150 students each summer. To be considered for admission students must have a 2.0 GPA, have taken no more than 30 units, and be eligible for Freshman Composition. The Institute was originally designed for Santa Ana College students who were residents of the city of Santa Ana. In the past two years it has been opened up to thirty students from the Los Angeles Community College District.

SSTI is the product of an extensive and long-standing institutional collaboration among the UCI Center for Educational Partnerships,

Santa Ana College (formerly Rancho Santiago College), Santa Ana Networks, LA Partners Advocating Student Success (LAPASS), and the Los Angeles Community College District. Both Santa Ana Networks and LAPASS are members of the Ford Foundation's sixteen city Urban Partnership Program. This broad-based collaboration has permitted the development of a program whose structure and organizational culture blends an intellectually rich, academically demanding curriculum with extensive social supports that instill confidence and dramatically raise the expectations of students.

SSTI is designed so that students can earn three credits by the end of the eleven days, taking one of five courses that are offered. This is possible because an initial class meeting is scheduled one month prior to the start of the Institute. At that time, students meet their instructors who provide an overview of the course they will be taking. Faculty assign a substantial amount of reading and, frequently, writing assignments to be completed prior to the start of the residential Institute.

The Institute has a number of features to facilitate the development of a learning community among the students and staff. The courses are jointly led by a faculty member and a counselor from the community college, with the assistance of two teaching assistants who are UCI undergraduates. The classes place heavy emphasis on group work and collaborative learning. The students, faculty and staff live together in UCI dormitories for the entire eleven days, making it virtually a full-time, around the clock program. There is an extensive support staff to assist both faculty and students. The Institute director, a Santa Ana dean, lives on-site in the dorms, as do several counselors and transfer center staff from Santa Ana College and the LA community colleges, who provide additional program support.

Faculty, counselors and TA's work closely with the students both inside and outside of class. Once classes end in the evening, study groups begin that run late into the night. Students and staff can be found at all hours meeting in study groups, working on papers in the Computer Lab, or sitting in small groups reviewing notes or preparing class assignments. In addition to the course work, students are given extensive information about transfer opportunities. The UCI office of Admissions arranges for an Academic Advising/Transfer Day when each student meets individually with

a UCI counselor to review their transcripts and discuss admissions requirements. Students considering a California State University campus or other institutions are also given detailed information and advice.

## Voices from the Institute

One way to understand the power of SSTI is to begin as we did by listening to the diverse voices of the participants:

*The dominant image in my mind is the students from earlier Institutes who have already graduated...you are now part of a legacy and a tradition...in eleven days you will be able to study and become a student in ways you never imagined...we will see you emerge as you really are. (Juan Lara, Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services, Opening Ceremony)*

*Students engage in cooperative learning like they never have in their whole lives. They experience that if they work hard enough, they can achieve things they never thought possible. (Jim Smith, Counselor)*

*I didn't know I could go to college until I went to Rancho. I didn't know what a community college was. Coming to SSTI, I already had people believing in me, but I didn't believe in myself...if you can finish this you can do anything you want. (Former SSTI student)*

*Everyone is positive here, they're always saying, "you can do it". It seems like everybody wants you to succeed...If you're stuck you can knock on the teacher's door at any hour... (Student, Psychology class)*

*We don't have to worry about our jobs, our kids. Here all we have is our little village. (Student, Humanities class)*

*When I first got here people were just talking with who they knew from school. Now we're united as a class. One of our classmates was thinking about dropping. We all pulled together to help him. (Student, Geology class)*

*The opportunity for collaboration, the support are great...SSTI has reaffirmed my sense of being a teacher. (Faculty member)*

*It was great meeting with a transfer counselor from the school I hope to go to. It was such a relief knowing that I'm on the right track. (Student, Geology class)*

*I've never tried this hard before, never put this kind of time in... I say this is not me, but it is. (Student, English class)*

*When you come to SSTI you're immersed in it. They make you focus and you realize what you can do. Its nice to be open to the world. I hadn't been to UCI before, and its a fifteen minute drive from my house. You're here and you're using the buildings, getting used to a TA. You get to bond with people and learn from them. You get to meet the world. (Former Student)*

## A Learning Organization

The collaborative dimension of SSTI brings people from a variety of institutions together around the goal of increasing the academic success of underrepresented students. The intense, communal experience of SSTI, the long process of collaborative planning, the many people involved in supporting the program, and the joint effort at evaluating outcomes, makes student achievement a powerful emotional reality in the hearts and minds of everyone involved.

SSTI is an annual natural laboratory to experiment, observe, and learn how to transform the lives of students. In serving as a laboratory, it is much more than the sum of its programmatic parts. The Institute's most distinctive feature is its ability to provide a learning environment for everyone involved.

The students learn study skills and time management. They are briefed on UC and CSU eligibility requirements and financial aid. They learn how to handle demanding academic courses, master difficult reading assignments, and write complex papers. However, as the voices of the students indicates, the transformative power of SSTI extends beyond the mastery of academic skills or transfer information. The experience of the Institute reaches deep into students' sense of the possibilities in their lives, their hopes and dreams for the future. The ability of the program to affect both mind and heart is vital, and helps everyone involved better understand what is required to truly promote educational access for underserved, nontraditional students.

The transformative power of SSTI affects the staff as well as the students. Faculty report that the Institute has been the most significant educational experience of their lives. All the faculty we interviewed emphasize that the collegial setting that SSTI provides lets them feel safe to experiment with their teaching, to break with

traditional lecture and try more active approaches. Counselors deeply value the classroom collaboration, using it to redefine and expand their traditional role. Rather than sitting in their offices waiting for students to arrive for appointments, SSTI lets them be proactive, reaching out to students, identifying problems at an early stage, and working to improve student success. The intense, collaborative experience of the Institute helps both teachers and counselors learn to turn the classroom into a powerful educational experience, one that is both demanding and supportive of students. Finally, the undergraduate TA's play a critical role as well, bridging the gap between students and staff.

SSTI has also been a powerful learning experience for the institutions that collaborate to offer and support the Institute each summer. As the Institute Director, Dean David Guzman of Santa Ana College notes, the experience of developing the Institute has helped the participating institutions build a strong collaboration from unlikely foundations. The initial designers came from a local community college, a prestigious public university, and a foundation funded educational reform coalition, organizations that rarely work well together. However, in the process of creating a powerful teaching and learning environment, they came to recognize that they all shared a deep concern for the success of underrepresented students. Over time they have moved from an initial wariness to a strong collaboration built on trust and mutual respect. As one of the founders puts it, "we have gone from formal treaties to real collaboration." In the process, the institutional sponsors have helped SSTI avoid the fate of marginalization that befalls many programs. The collaborating institutions evaluate the Institute annually and track the success of the students over time. This process of joint inquiry ensures that new lessons learned each summer are shared among the partners. All the partners agree that the sustained institutional collaboration has produced a number of spin-offs, and that the Institute has had an impact on institutional policies and practices far beyond its size. During the five years of SSTI:

- Santa Ana College has doubled the number of underrepresented students transferring to the University of California.
- Santa Ana College has moved from 44th to 9th place in the state of California in the number of Chicano/Latino students transferring to the UC system.

- Ninety-five percent of all students have successfully completed the general education course they enroll in as part of the Institute, compared to an average completion rate of sixty percent among students at Santa Ana College.
- It has promoted a close working relationship among all partners, leading to new programs sponsored by Santa Ana College, UCI, the City of Santa Ana and the school district.
- Stronger ties have developed between Santa Ana and Los Angeles educational institutions.

## THE STUDENTS

SSTI is designed to serve underrepresented students who have long faced substantial barriers to continuing their education. It was initially developed for the low-income, overwhelmingly Latino students graduating from the Santa Ana public schools. The addition of LAPASS and the Los Angeles Community College District to the collaboration has increased the number of African American students at the Institute to approximately twenty-five percent.

The majority of students are the first in their families to attend college, many the first to complete high school. For over sixty percent, English is their second language. They struggle to balance school with work and family responsibilities. Many are parents themselves, or have significant family obligations, and over one-half work more than 20 hours a week. While in high school many were placed in academic tracks that denied them access to the higher-level English, mathematics, and science courses essential to success in college. As a result, they often begin at the community college with reading and math deficiencies that require them to take remedial course work. The community college students who enroll in the Institute represent the "narrowing of the pipeline" phenomena that so restricts the flow of minority students entering higher education. Saul Geiser, of the Office of the President of the University of California, estimates that statewide, for every 100 African-American and every 100 Latino students enrolled in the 10th grade, only 5 African American and 4 Latinos become eligible for the University and only 1 from each group will actually enroll in one of the campuses (presentation to the Outreach Task Force for the Board of Regents, University of California, February 1, 1996).

However the examination of these barriers has motivated the founders and staff of SSTI to explore new approaches to access. They have great respect for the many students who struggle to overcome so many challenges. A long-term counselor in the program reflected on his experience:

*To come to SSTI, students have had to go to their employers, their families, their priests to work out the arrangements.... many of them have children of their own and to be away for eleven days shows a real commitment.... when I see what they have to go through I say to them that the students are my heroes...*

A faculty member who was taught several times in the Institute has a similar view of the students:

*The students we have here are unique. They've been at the community college about a year and a half...they come from high poverty areas, under-educated...there is gang-life going on in their community, drugs, all these things are going on in their lives...but they have such potential. This is what makes it so exciting for me. We give them the belief in themselves, so instead of their saying, "oh my God, I have one more year to go," they say, "I'm close, I'm close"...*

SSTI began in the spirit of learning and experimentation. Its founders, who had long worked on issues of transfer and access, asked a fundamental question: how many community college students could be made competitively eligible for the UC system if they had the opportunity to exclusively focus on their studies? The various programmatic features of SSTI flow from this question. The founders believed that underrepresented students were capable of much more than their previous school performance would indicate, and designed a setting to test that hypothesis.

Sara Lundquist, Vice President for Student Services at Santa Ana College, recalls the initial thinking that led to the design of the Institute:

*It was a moment when we were almost paralyzed by all the bad news about our student performance...Santa Ana College was transferring 3 students to the UC. Isaac Guzman said, "there are four courses that transfer-ready kids can't get through. What if we took those hardest courses and figured a way to get them through." That was the beginning, and we all began contributing our different*

*perspectives...We drew on our knowledge of all the barriers that students face and asked "what if we subtracted them from the students' lives, what would emerge?" SSTI became the answer.*

The success of the Institute reflects the seriousness and thoughtfulness with which the partners approached the initial experiment. Over time, much has been learned about the types of academic programs, social supports and institutional collaborations that are needed to develop the latent potential of students. As a consequence, hundreds of underserved students have come to believe that sí, se puede - *yes, it can be done*, and the collaborating partners have learned about the institutional policies and practices needed for effective access.

# Building a Learning Community

## The Classroom Experience

Academic achievement is at the center of the Institute, and the classroom experience is a powerful mechanism to promote student transformation. In 1997, the courses offered included Psychology, English Literature, Humanities, Speech, and Oceanography. The courses are carefully selected, since the staff recognize that not all classes are appropriate for SSTI, for instance, math classes or science classes with extensive lab work. While in some ways similar to courses offered at the community college, the unique setting of SSTI has deeply influenced how they are designed, the pedagogy employed, the degree to which classroom dynamics are monitored, and the accessibility of the teacher.

As faculty and staff have reflected on their work with students, they have altered the classroom to maximize its impact on students. Over time, the staff have linked roles and activities that are typically kept separate in educational settings. This is most evident in the division of labor in the classroom, where a faculty member, counselor, and teaching assistant work as a team, playing differing, but equally critical roles. This coordination of roles is responsible for the distinctive academic culture of SSTI, characterized by a delicately balanced blend of effort, intensity, support, and collaboration. Although the staff work as a team, the classroom experience can initially be understood by examining each role in turn.

## Role of the Classroom Teacher: Promoting Transformation

To teach effectively, the faculty must adapt the goals and academic demands of their disciplines to the unique needs of SSTI students. Faculty must also recognize the stresses that students face as they attempt to master the course material. For instance, most are away from home for the first time, living with students from different

backgrounds. Most of all, they have little time to absorb the material. The need to complete 3 credits in 11 days creates a demand that students "get it now." There is no time for "slacking" or even inefficient study habits; and there is little time even for sleep. It is this compressed time period, and the intensity and rapid pace that it creates, that influences every aspect of the teacher's role. First and foremost, the intensity of the session demands that, in the words of Geology professor Debbie Brooks, you "forget everything and put the student first."

There is no "official" educational philosophy at SSTI. Faculty members are encouraged to make their own judgements about how their disciplines can contribute to the success of the students. However, over time, collegial discussions among faculty and staff have led to a shared orientation to teaching at SSTI, and a broad consensus about what makes for an effective course.

**Rigorous Courses:** Academic rigor is essential. The impact and legitimacy conferred by rigorous courses is important to both students and staff. For students, success at SSTI is a significant confidence boost. Both current and former students emphasize that they are sustained by the sense that "if we can do it here we can do it anywhere." The fact that the vast majority of SSTI students succeed in demanding courses with rigorous grading changes how they view their capacities and their prospects in the university system. Were anyone to think that success at SSTI is due to "giving away grades" then the believability of the SSTI message to students would be cast into doubt. As one of the teachers put it:

*The students have to trust that we're not trying to fool them... at the end of the course the student needs to be able to say, "I did something," and gain the confidence that they did the work and the affirmation from the professionals that this is quality work, that you are good.*

**Participation:** SSTI draws everyone into an intense involvement with its activities. Faculty are central in making this happen. First, they promote a classroom environment that encourages students to speak up and take risks. In Composition and Speech classes, students are required to express themselves through written or oral presentations. This can be quite intimidating, but faculty press students to try. Kathleen Beaufait, the speech professor, described her approach.

*Students have a lot of anxiety about public speaking. I gave them some questions to answer right away. They never thought they would have to get up on the first day, but we made them do it...*

Second, students often initially find the subject matter alien or intimidating. The faculty are sensitive to this problem and actively work to eliminate obstacles to the students' engagement with the course material. In the process, faculty learn a great deal about student culture and become extraordinarily creative in finding ways to draw out the students. For instance, students are frequently intimidated by poems and often feel that literature has little to do with them, so the English professor carefully selects works that illuminate the students' lives. In Psychology, students typically find few references to the experience of minorities, so the faculty member integrates the emerging research literature on people of color, as well as contributions to the field from Latino and African-American social scientists.

Third, faculty respond directly to diversity issues in the classroom that often inhibit participation. They teach to the diversity rather than struggling against it. The teachers and counselors are diverse, while the student body is almost exclusively Latino and African-American, producing all the complexities of the contemporary classroom. If faculty are perceived as inaccessible, needed participation will not occur, and students will miss a key element in their learning. As a result, faculty "explode the stereotypes of inaccessibility" that students have inculcated through prior schooling. Professor Irene Malmgren of the Psychology Class talked of a critical moment on the last day of class:

*...I build the entire course toward issues of identity, the stages that people go through. While you're in the immersion stage you typically have a feeling of "pro my group, anti your group"...while in the resolution stage you reconnect as your identity becomes more secure...Then one student asked, "what's it like for you to be the white person when you're the target for everybody's anger?" So I talked about what white folks deal with, and the sense of responsibility and the realization of privilege. What does that mean when I teach in a place like Santa Ana when I'm committed to them and their becoming leaders in their own community...I talked about the future and will there still be a space for me...and I started to cry and they got hushed, but that's okay with me, that's*

*the moment. I don't mind modeling emotions...they've been doing such a great job of sharing their experience that it was fair for me to share my own...then it was time to go to the class dance...the moment I walked up the entire class came up to meet me and took me down to dance with them. I felt they must have been watching for me, that the message was that you are part of us.*

Fourth, faculty do not limit themselves to the classrooms. Because they live in the dorms along with students, faculty "do not go home after class, but stay right there...we are their neighbors." Faculty urge students to call on them at any hour of the night for help with material they do not understand. This willingness to join the students at any time conveys a powerful message about the commitment of the faculty at SSTI. As faculty and students live together and work intensively to master the material, a learning community develops in which students feel cared for and faculty gain legitimacy in their eyes. One of the faculty members recalls:

*Students are shocked when I ask them a question like "are you okay?" They're blown away at first...eventually they start pouring out all kinds of issues.*

**Collaborative Learning:** One of the most common ways of helping students cope is through the use of group learning. This is a new approach to learning for the students whose previous classes have typically emphasized lecturing, and whose college experience is often described as anonymous and alienating. A young, African-American student notes:

*I know nobody at the college. School is not a place you socialize. This place is like a twenty four hour institution. You bump into people, bump into them again, we all have dinner together...when you open up you find people have interests just like yourself.*

Sherri Blake, a staff member in the Santa Ana Transfer Center who serves as support staff at the Institute, describes the life of many community college students who constantly have to juggle school, work, and family:

*There are a lot of "PCP" students. They go from the parking lot, to class, and back to the parking lot."*

Right from the beginning study groups are formed, and staff do considerable cheerleading for this approach. Collaborative learning is modeled in the classroom and carries over into the evening when

students do the bulk of their studying. Faculty and counselors lead group study sessions in the dorms until students "get the hang of it," and they seek out individuals who are having difficulty making connections with the other students.

Implicit in group study is the notion that authority is not located in just one person, but that everyone has something to offer. The faculty build on this by encouraging students to take on the teaching role in relation to their peers. Students are encouraged to learn from one another. As one faculty member describes it:

*The best grades normally go to the people who do the most teaching in the study groups. If they can get it well enough to explain it to their peers, they can do well on the tests.*

Group study is a revelation to most of the students. They discover that cooperative learning is much more powerful than individual study in mastering large amounts of material in a short time. During the eleven days, they often progress together as a class, providing an esprit that energizes them and giving them the needed confidence that they can indeed pass the course in eleven days. Students said that group study was one of the most valuable aspects of the SSTI experience. They intend to use it when they go back to their college and, according to interviews with former students, most do adopt group study as a routine approach to school. Isaac Guzman, who has served as a counselor in all the Institutes, recounts when he first recognized the impact of group learning:

*After the first Institute and the students returned to Santa Ana College for their Fall semester, I found that they would come back here to UCI, find an empty classroom, and study in groups...that was the lasting effect...*

**Constant Feedback:** The intensity created at SSTI, with its attendant demand that students "get it now" in the classroom, requires that faculty be aware of student progress, difficulties, and concerns. They provide students an ongoing stream of feedback on their progress. Exams, quizzes, or papers are scheduled almost every day. Faculty and students agree that frequent feedback provides critical information. When the feedback is positive, a sense of confidence builds in students that is almost palpable. But, even when students encounter difficulties, the faculty, counselors, teaching assistants and fellow students are ready to help.

There are also a number of informal sources of feedback and assessment. In Psychology, each student is given a blue book to answers questions that explore the student experience of the class. Both the teacher and the counselor read the blue books between classes and use the student reactions to modify the class. In Oceanography, after every class, the faculty member asks students to fill out flash cards on which they answer two questions: What is it about this material that you know so well that you never want to hear it again? and What is it that you need help with? Cards are pooled in the center of the room and read anonymously so that everyone can get a picture of the class's strengths and weaknesses. Students are often surprised to learn that others are struggling with what they know well. This gives students a sense of confidence and provides information about where to look for help. Faculty and counselors count this technique invaluable in providing up to date information which guide them in their attempts to be supportive to students.

In all the classes faculty and counselors regularly probe to see if the students understand the material. Group work is a valuable way for the instructor to see students as they struggle publicly to grasp the course concepts and to teach each other. The late night study groups and informal discussions in the dorms provide another valuable channel. During the evening students may request help with an essay, the preparation of the next day's speech assignment, or start a discussion of how ideas in the Humanities class might relate to their lives.

## ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR: EMOTIONAL CENTER OF THE CLASSROOM

Just as the faculty have significantly modified their pedagogy, so the counselors have reassessed their role in promoting student transformation. In the process, they have significantly redefined the nature of counseling. Through our interviews and observations, we have identified a variety of functions that counselors perform:

1. Track emotional dynamics in the classroom
2. Advocate for learning
3. Conflict and crisis intervention
4. Cheerleader/career advisor
5. Study skills coach
6. Assistant teacher/superstudent
7. Disciplinarian

**Tracking Emotional Dynamics:** The most often mentioned contribution of the counselor is to stay in touch with emotional issues throughout the SSTI community. The intensity of the coursework requires continual focus and commitment, so the classroom climate can be easily weakened by the intrusion of emotional issues such as homesickness or self-doubt. It is here that the counselors perform a critical function. Teachers refer to the counselors as "an extra pair of eyes" assuring that emotional reactions will be noted and dealt with. Just as students need to "get the material now," emotional issues need to be identified immediately and responded to by the staff. As one counselor notes:

*In the ordinary class, emotional issues don't get in the way as much as they do here. There students can go home, talk to friends, or let time heal the situation. Here we can't do any of that. So even small events, if they are ignored can grow and fester.*

Teachers are themselves stressed by the demands of the Institute. In fact, their role requires them to create much of the intensity to which students react. Having a counselor on the team to deal with emotional issues leaves the teacher free to carry out their academic role. Psychology instructor Irene Malmgren puts it this way, "the counselor is essential. I push the students, he catches them."

Counselors play this role everywhere in the SSTI community. In the classroom they notice who is involved and who is hanging back. They sometimes interrupt the teacher if large numbers of students don't seem to be understanding the material. During the evening, they monitor which students are involved in study groups and which stay to themselves. Any students who seem to be isolated are encouraged to connect with a group or are assigned to a TA. According to Jim Smith, counselor in Oceanography:

*The group situation really lets us see who is getting it and who isn't. It gives us a real picture. You can literally see if a student is not in the group, or if a group seems to be avoiding a student for one reason or another.*

Both current students and alumni emphasize the importance of the counselor's sensitivity to their needs. They appreciate that counselors are proactive and do not wait for the student to articulate a problem. Several noted that they were so fearful and discouraged that it was only through a counselor's active encouragement that they did not leave the Institute on the first night.

**Counselor as Advocate for the Learning Process:** Having two professionals in the classroom permits them to work as a team, maximizing the learning possibilities for students. While the faculty member has responsibility for the academic content of the course, the counselor pays close attention to the learning process. This permits the counselor to be an advocate for learning, a pivotal role in fostering a learning community. Professor Virginia Starrett talked about how vital she has found this division of work in the classroom:

*The counselor is really attuned to questions hanging in the air, but are unspoken, so he will interrupt and make sure we take time for the students to express their questions...He mirrors back their concerns to them. Its like, "hand me your concerns, and I'll hand you back reassurance. You can see the anxiety level simmer down as soon as we ask them to talk. They don't feel like they're out there on their own.*

In traditional classes instructors have great difficulty coping with students who appear disengaged or are floundering. But at SSTI the counselor is always available to provide extra attention, leaving the instructor free to continue with the academic agenda. One of the counselors described this role:

*We have one student who didn't do the homework assignment which is worth 25% of the grade. This student would have to do almost perfect work to get a "C." I got in that student's face and told him what his situation was. He is now working very, very hard, and is doing surprisingly well. Now this student brings out the counselor in me. I don't want to see him fail. I don't want to let him fail.*

Sometimes the advocacy function is expressed by the counselor breaking into the flow of the class. Since the faculty member and counselor have agreed upon their complementary roles, the counselor is free to alert the teacher to problems that students may have with the course material. As Isaac Guzman, who has served as a counselor in several different classes, notes:

*Sometimes if I'm getting a lot of body language from the kids, I'll stop the class. "Hey teacher, they're not getting it here." Sometimes I'm not even getting it. Then she can go over the questions one more time.*

**Conflict and Crisis Intervention:** Interpersonal conflict and personal problems can also undermine the academic focus of the classroom.

Faculty report that, in the intense SSTI classroom, they can be overwhelmed by unexpected crises. Interpersonal conflicts can easily crop up between students not used to living away from home, let alone with diverse roommates. In some classes, such as psychology, these tensions can be integrated into discussions of such concepts as identity and diversity. However, in others they need to be handled outside of class. At this point the counselor enters the picture. Experienced SSTI counselors report handling a wide range of conflicts and crises over the years. In addition, other unexpected events, such as a health emergency is also handled by the counselor. John Acuna, the counselor in the Psychology class recalls:

*A few years ago we had a student who had a rather severe asthma attack. This needed immediate attention. I ended up taking care of it—getting the medical personnel over here, going to the hospital with the girl. This allowed the class to continue.*

**Counselor as Cheerleader/Career Advisor:** From the very beginning, SSTI provides students with clear and positive images of their future. Students are showered with a steady stream of positive messages. From the first orientation meeting until the graduation ceremony on the last day, students hear encouragement about their developing skills and about their prospects for further study. They are given the opportunity to talk with alumni who have gone on to university, they are visited by administrators and staff from their home colleges, and they are continually encouraged by their teachers.

The counselor plays a critical role in orchestrating this system of positive feedback. It is the counselor who makes sure that students are "getting the message" about their ability and eligibility for university transfer. Counselors hold group sessions where students can talk about their goals, hear others, and realize that they are not alone in their aspirations. They encourage students to express themselves in the classroom. They highlight good comments that might be missed by a busy teacher. They know each individual's strengths and interests, and use that knowledge to help students connect with the course material. As one counselor describes this function:

*We are on the lookout for anything positive. I might say... "gee Juan, your phrasing here is very insightful"... or "your interpretation of this poem is different from anything I've ever seen. It is quite*

*original." We have to be honest, have to be real, but we look for the student's strengths and make sure that the student realizes them.*

Finally, counselors, more than anyone else, exhort students to seriously consider and plan for transfer. They surface misconceptions and information gaps that might cause students to unnecessarily limit their horizons. As one counselor put it, " we take away the myths and help the students absorb the information that's out there." Part of their work is to make sure that students talk to counselors from the UC and CSU systems who visit the SSTI program. A counselor recalls:

*One young woman who had wonderful grades said she would go to CSU Fullerton instead of UCI. I asked why. She said that she heard that the UC schools were more expensive than the CSU schools. I said "what's the big deal? CSU's tuition is two thousand dollars while UC is four thousand." This really opened her eyes.*

**Study Skills Coach:** SSTI students come with relatively unsophisticated ideas about how to study. Counselors are in a ideal position to identify misunderstandings and help students with their skills. One counselor notes, "I have to tell them that it is all right to write in the margins of the textbook. They don't know that is okay."

It is the counselor who takes primary responsibility for making sure that study skills are interwoven into the class sessions. Sometimes counselors will give explicit lectures on how to study. Often they intersperse quick comments about test taking or collaborative approaches. They show students how to work in groups, how to break down content into manageable chunks, how to take turns teaching each other, how to use visual aids such as charts and diagrams, and how to exploit the characteristics of multiple choice tests.

Counselors and instructors see study skills coaching as a vital function at the Institute, since it can level the playing field for students who, in the past, have received little advice on how to approach their studies. They believe that lack of sophisticated study skills artificially depresses grades.

Students appreciate the advice and coaching they receive. During our interviews, many noted how important developing study skills was to them.

*The best part of SSTI is the study skills. I never knew I could learn in so many ways. It's not just from a book... We make charts*

*and diagrams... we work in groups to teach each other... we made a model of the brain out on the quad where each one of us became a part of the brain and we had to make the brain by rearranging ourselves in space.... I found out that I am a kinesthetic learner and a visual learner and an auditory learner.*

**Assistant Teacher or Superstudent:** In some ways, the counselor resembles an assistant instructor. During a class session the counselor might chime in with encouragement, lecture on study skills, or talk with individuals during breaks. Counselors are sometimes conversant with subject matter that they were trained in, or because they had worked with that SSTI course in previous years.

However, lack of familiarity with the subject matter is not a reason for counselors to hang back in the course. Instead, they take on the role of "superstudents." They read the textbook and struggle with the confusion attendant on learning anything new. In this way they connect with student experience. Counselors openly share their confusions and provide valuable modeling in asking for help from the instructor. They convey to the student the sensible notion that learning anything for the first time is often difficult, and that diligence and patience are essential. The superstudent role keeps the counselor "tuned in" to the student experience and supports the role of being "the emotional center of the class." As counselors and students study together they develop a relationship that facilitates the other aspects of the counselor's role. One counselor recalls:

*When I was the counselor for the History of Jazz course I had to work very hard. I stayed up with the students listening to the different instruments, trying to recognize them, trying to follow the music. In the course of that experience we really bonded. I became one of them.*

**Disciplinarian:** SSTI has a set of minimal rules designed to support the community's intense focus on academics. These rules include prohibitions on drugs and firearms, and an 11:00 P.M. curfew after which students must be back on campus. Breaches of these rules are rare, but violators are subject to sanctions.

In disciplinary situations, it is often the counselor who gets involved first. Counselors and instructors do not wait for abuses to occur, but try to anticipate likely violations. At this point counselors often move in with warnings and reminders about SSTI rules and penalties. As John Acuna puts it, "I am the heavy. I try to let the teacher teach."

In the event of explicit violations, the SSTI director is called in to review the situation and decide on the seriousness of the offense. At this point, the counselor may serve as an advocate for the student, making sure that the situation is fully discussed and that student rights are respected in the decision. A counselor recalls a previous Institute where students were in danger of expulsion.

*This year we had a situation where three of my students were suspected of being off campus. The class was worried. What did this mean? Were they going to get thrown out? I was concerned because this might negatively affect the whole class. I told them that Jim was going to be in there with the students and that he would make sure that their rights were not trampled on... once the facts were in it was clear that there was a misunderstanding.*

## ROLE OF THE TEACHING ASSISTANT: BRIDGE BETWEEN STUDENTS AND STAFF

The SSTI teaching assistants are upper division undergraduates at UCI and, when possible, they major in the subject matter of the class to which they are assigned. Traditionally, the teaching assistant role is considered ancillary to the professor/student relationship in the university. However, at SSTI the teaching assistants play a vital role in establishing and sustaining the learning community.

The TA's are considered a part of the classroom team. In the words of one instructor, "they are at eye level with the students." TA's are close in age and are themselves students in the very institution, the university, that the SSTI students are aiming toward. TA's can both share an understanding of the student's difficulties and frustrations as well as give advice about transfer and coping with university life. As one faculty member reflected:

*Because the TA's are so close to the students, they are trusted in ways we are not. The TA's can really demystify college for them.*

The TA's have a strong sense of this dimension of their role. In our interviews, we found them to be very self-conscious about using their unique role to help the students. During a focus group interview, one TA noted:

*We serve as a bridge between the staff and the students...when they come to us to talk...they want to find out more about who we are and what we've been through. They're trying to size up our experience to see if they're going to be able to do it.*

Another TA described how this "bridging" function of their role lets them blend personal and academic support for the students:

*Beyond the academic...we're in touch with their personal lives...every night in the suites we have discussions. Questions may start about school, but the conversation soon goes far beyond that. The personal connection we have with the students breaks through any feelings of intimidation, they know they can come to us about anything.*

Their almost "around the clock" involvement with the students gives the TA's a unique vantage point on to the community life of the Institute, helping them see the total impact that participation has on the students. For instance, when asked what life was like at the Institute after eleven o'clock the TA's offered these descriptions:

*That's when a different kind of learning takes place. You learn more in school outside of the classroom. That's learning about people and how to deal with different cultures and different ages...that's what goes on. They're doing work, but they take breaks and tell stories...they're learning how to live with other people, how to adjust, be respectful, be caring and supportive of each other. You name it, that's when it happens.*

*Its pretty hectic. I think its even more intense than during class time. From eleven to three AM is when they're writing their reports, studying for exams. There were three nights this week when students didn't leave the Computer Lab until four-thirty in the morning, and then they come back and get up at seven AM. When you ask what happens after eleven, I think the work happens then. Its like a twenty-four hour thing here...Eleven o'clock is when people really start down to business here.*

TA's talk regularly with the faculty and counselors and, because of their unique relationship, have valuable insights to offer about the students. They are a critical source of early warning signals of potential difficulty which faculty and counselors can then follow up.

*We read the material along with the students, so if we're having any trouble with it we know they are too...we give the professor a sense of how much the students can handle, how much more they can do.*

The extensive contact between students and TA's has impact in both directions. The TA's had much to say about the effect of the role on

them. The following is a sample of comments made during a focus group interview:

*I appreciate the level of respect I get from the teachers and counselors. During the regular school year I'm intimidated to talk to my professors. I grew up in a culture where you have to listen to your elders and never give your own ideas. Here my ideas are valued, regardless of my age.*

*A couple of weeks ago, I didn't know what I wanted to study in graduate school, and this has settled it in my mind. Now I know I want to work with college students...this program has been the most powerful experience I've had in school.*

*This program has given me so many special moments...just hearing a thank you when I didn't think I had given a student that much help...When they see me as helping their improvement in class, that means a lot, and I didn't expect that. I never thought that I would have the impact on students that I've had.*

*Being a TA here gives you such better skills in teaching, speaking, studying, organizing discussion groups.*

Finally, TA's report that they are often inspired by the difficulties that SSTI students have to overcome to get a degree. As one TA put it when asked about his experience with the students:

They *become* my *mentors. They have to deal with things that I never dreamed of. Some of them have children of their own, and their families are not supportive...*

## The Student Experience

The student experience at SSTI is intense and heart-felt. Students report that during the eleven days in the program they undergo profound transformations in the way they think about their abilities, their transfer prospects, their relationships with teachers, their back home institutions, and their families. SSTI, in short, helps students to reconceive their futures, while assisting them in gaining in the skills and developing the behaviors needed to realize their newly emerging plans and dreams. To understand the depth of this transformation, one needs to appreciate the many barriers to transfer to a four-year institution that the students face.

The students who attend SSTI face a range of difficulties that impede their academic progress. Many come from families where they are the first generation to go to college, and some are the first to graduate from high school. Cultural and family pressures often cause students to feel caught in the middle, as the desire to continue their education often conflicts with loyalty to family, and expectations that they stay close to home, participate in family life and have children. As one young African-American woman described:

*It's hard to say to my mom and dad that "I love you, I'm proud of you, but I don't want to be like you". That is contradictory. My friends and family always ask, "why are you still in school?" I can't say to the people in the hood that "I'm a great debater." I still wrestle with that...every time my husband and I see someone they want to know why we don't have kids yet.*

Even in supportive families, students struggle to find the information and advice that they need. Families lack information about the courses students need, application procedures, or the complexities of financial aid. Parents can encourage in a general way, but don't understand the academic and professional world. A young Latina woman who transferred to the university after completing SSTI reflects on her experience with her family:

*It's so hard. You work so hard to make up for lost time in K-12 and you're struggling, struggling, struggling. Then you go home and you want your family to be proud of you, but they don't know what UCLA is. They always say that they're proud of me, but they don't actually realize what I'm going through.*

Another student, who plans to transfer and prepare for a teaching career, talked about the struggles that he faces now:

*My parents came right from Mexico. They worked in the fields their whole lives. They were so proud when I graduated from high school...but it is hard for them to understand why I have to go to college. They love me but they just don't understand.*

Once students adapt to the pace and intensity of SSTI they frequently reflect on their earlier schooling. They typically talked of how unprepared they feel and how great the gap is between the Institute and the schools they have attended. They found rules and requirements confusing and difficult to navigate. High school counselors were often too burdened to spend time with them, and frequently they did not emphasize college preparation or encourage transfer. Students also report that they found the curriculum undemanding, and felt little challenge in the classroom. A twenty year old Latino male commented:

*Throughout my whole education K-12 I had nobody pushing me. If a teacher told me I was a good student, it made me feel like she was sorry for me and was lying to me so I wouldn't feel bad. Most of school is insulting. Any time you require little of people, they give you little.*

**The Student Experience of Academics:** SSTI is designed to help students overcome every barrier they face, with each difficulty countered by a programmatic feature of the Institute. Through the eleven day immersion in this "academic boot camp," students discover that they are capable of a higher level of academic performance than they had ever dreamed was possible. The blend of intensity and support breeds confidence, and a variety of practices permits students to try out new identities as students. In the process they become engaged in a powerful learning community of like-minded peers and staff who support high levels of aspiration.

Student transformation begins in the capacity to concentrate on academics. The Institute is structured to eliminate all distractions. It takes students out of their daily environments and places them on a university campus. Although UC, Irvine is nearby, few SSTI students have ever visited it before. The residence halls, classrooms, study lounges, dining facility, and library are all located near one another, creating a sense of living in a small village. The Institute's

limited number of rules are all designed to promote focus and eliminate distractions.

Students arrive unsure of what to expect. Most express a mixture of apprehension and desire to take advantage of a good deal and "earn three easy credits in eleven days." However, they soon discover that the courses are more intense and demanding than any they have ever taken. Work begins immediately, and most of the classes have a quiz or writing assignment due the second day. Students quickly realize that the only way they can make it through the Institute is to carefully manage their time, and work constantly, often into the early hours of the morning. As one student put it:

*Before you would have a whole weekend to study for a test, but here you better study because the next test is coming up in a few hours.*

But as students begin to recognize the intensity of effort they must put into their studies, the staff provide a range of support to help them cope. Students soon become aware of the unique division of labor in the classroom, and the distinctive roles of teacher, counselor, and teaching assistant. All the students that we interviewed noted that their stereotypes were shattered as the staff showed themselves to be intensely caring and concerned about them. For instance, the students all emphasized that the teacher is not a detached figure lecturing in the front of the room, but a person who talks to them and is clearly concerned with their success. The behavior most often mentioned is the willingness of teachers to stay up late with the students and make themselves available during their most difficult times. One student described his experience the second night:

*It's not like we have teachers here, they are more like friends. If you are stuck you can knock on their doors at any hour. We were studying at three o'clock in the morning...she passed by and asked if we were going to sleep yet. She heard people talking in the lounge and got up to see if we needed help.*

Another student, when asked about what was most distinctive about the classes, talked about the intense conversations they had, and how the class got to see their teacher as a human being.

*She is the heart of our class. She opened up one day...that was the strangest thing, seeing a teacher cry. I have never seen this on a college campus...it was a good thing...moving...it brought the class together.*

The students quickly become aware that the classes call for active learning. They offered many examples of how the faculty worked to "breathe life" into the course material and encourage student involvement. Students, used to more passive learning styles, begin to take responsibility not only for their own learning, but for that of other's as well. Students are continually invited to engage in dialogue and offer their perspectives on the material. The classroom is a context for modeling learning skills, and students are encouraged to teach each other in study groups.

Of all the programmatic features of SSTI, students most often mentioned the study skills that they learned, especially the importance of study groups and collaborative learning. Most expressed amazement at how much material they could learn in a short period of time. Former students that we interviewed made the point that such skills served them all the way through their education. The following comments, taken from a student focus group interview, give a sense of the student experience:

*When I get back to college I'm going to start organizing study groups.*

*SSTI gave me confidence in my study habits. I was skeptical about them. I've never been under this much pressure before.*

*When I went to UCLA I looked for people to study with. I was surprised by how many people studied that way. They knew all about it.*

For most students, the combination of intense focus, highly committed staff, a learning community of like-minded peers, and innovative pedagogy adds up to a successful experience. Many students report that SSTI is the first time they received an "A" in a course. More important even than the grade itself, the experience of the SSTI learning community provides them with a powerful model of success. The many opportunities to express their emerging comprehension of the course material and engage the teacher and one another promotes new kinds of behavior, and a new sense of themselves as students. SSTI provides a safe environment in which they can try out new identities, and begin to explore what it would mean to be a university student. This transformation often begins with the experience that effort leads to success. One of the young, male Latino students who had never done well in school before expressed the experience of many others:

*You work hard, you stay up late, you see the grades that you get and you say, "did I do that?"...for the first time I got an "A." My mouth was open for twenty minutes.*

*This experience was echoed in many of our interviews with students:*

*I've never tried this hard before, never put in the time...I say this is not me, but it is!*

*I put myself on a different level...I think about what I'm going to become. You know...what I'm going to be.*

*It's in the content of my papers. I'm getting "A's." It's on the paper. I can visualize it.*

Success at SSTI creates an anticipation of future achievement, which is nurtured by the staff in a variety of ways. During the first week the staff organize what they term the "Going for the Gold" event where a panel of SSTI alumni return to talk with the current students. Here students can see others just like them who used the program as a springboard for academic success, and can talk with them about any questions and concerns they may have. Late in the second week the Institute sponsors an Academic Advisement/Transfer Day where each student meets with a transfer counselor to go over their transcripts and review the requirements for the UC and CSU systems. Also, throughout the entire eleven days, at meals, or during breaks in the evening, there are many opportunities for informal discussions where students and staff share their thoughts about careers, dreams, and future plans. Finally, the experience of success does not end with the Institute. When students return to their home campuses, they typically seek out their teachers and counselors, who serve as mentors until the students transfer to the university.

However, helping students to develop a positive image of future success requires that they make sense of their past experience of school. SSTI provides an opportunity to put past educational difficulties in perspective. The experience of hard work with a committed staff and an intellectually rich curriculum offers students the basis to more realistically reflect on their past experience. Students become less likely to blame themselves for failure or slow progress. The opportunity to talk with other students is critical to the reassessment of their experience. Students gain perspective as they discover that they are not alone in having to balance work, family responsibilities, and school.

**The Student Experience of Support:** The intense environment makes many demands on the students. During the first few days they have to adjust to the university environment and cope with being away from their families. Many students have children that they must leave in the care of others. As one young mother explained:

*It is very hard to leave your family and live in a dorm with strangers. For most of us this is the first time we've been away from home.*

Another nineteen year old Latina woman talked of the struggle she had with her parents as she prepared for the Institute:

*My father didn't want me to go...he said, "why, why do you have to leave home? Why can't you just study here?"*

There is a high level of congruence between how staff and students perceive their roles in the classroom. Students report that whenever the going gets tough, there is always somebody there to support them. The team, with their overlapping roles of instructor, counselor, and TA is able to continually monitor the student group, quickly identifying students who are having difficulty or who become discouraged. Whatever the issue, and whenever it occurs, the staff are able to provide support. As one student in the Speech class put it, no matter how late it may be, you can always call on someone for help

*We have four people. If the teacher's asleep, go to the counselor. If she's not available, go to the TA's. You have your choice.*

The classroom, with its active pedagogy and group interaction, provides an important support. Students appreciate the free exchange, and teachers that are extraordinarily open to questions. One student, who reported that he ordinarily never spoke up in class noted how much he had changed:

*I'm learning now by asking questions. The teacher and counselor are totally open to questions...they'll answer anything with an open mind.*

Many students noted how different the classroom climate was from anything they had experienced before. A twenty-three year old Latina woman described:

*Over at Rancho I'm afraid to ask a question in class...We nod...we say we understand but we don't...I feel I will make a fool of myself. Here you are comfortable...you can ask questions three or four times.*

## Spinoffs and Unintended Consequences

The impact of SSTI is not limited to the eleven days that students attend the Institute. The collaboration supporting SSTI permits lessons learned to be shared among a variety of institutions, and the networks of support that are created during the Institute continue throughout the year, sustaining a wide variety of innovative efforts. Insights gained at the Institute have helped enrich the roles of teacher and counselor at the community college. Continuing contact with staff and informal support networks at their home campuses help sustain the changes that students have begun to make. Finally, SSTI has had a significant impact on faculty culture and institutional programs and policies at the partner institutions.

**The Impact of SSTI on Staff:** SSTI has a two-fold impact on staff. They are invigorated by the success of the students, and their experience in the program has helped enrich and redefine their roles.

Every staff member reported that their interaction with the students was inspiring. They become deeply involved in the lives of their students, since the program permits them to experience students "not as strangers but as neighbors." Their close contact gives them a deeper understanding of the students they teach. Staff come to appreciate the many obstacles that students must overcome to attend the Institute, and they see the tremendous effort that students make during the eleven days. The following comments are characteristic of the staff's view of the students:

*We're talking about people who are invested...In the five years I've been here I've seen maybe one or two students who aren't trying to succeed...some of the life situations of these students are unreal. They're heroes in what they're trying to do...when I hear the stories the students tell, I am incredulous.*

The growth of the students during the residential experience, as well as the success of alumni, confirms the initial hypothesis that the Institute was designed to test. Although the average GPA of entering students is 2.6, staff are convinced that student grades are artificially low, with their true ability masked by difficult circumstances. As a long-time faculty member put it:

*If these students weren't outstanding to start with, they wouldn't be "C" students at the college. As academics we measure their success with letter grades. The beauty of SSTI is that they get to*

*see themselves measured in traditional academic ways, and experience us judging them as highly successful. Because they get "C's" during the year we tend to lump them in with students who don't try. Here we see the reality of what they can do when all the demands of their life are removed. If they didn't have tremendous skills, they wouldn't survive...when you can put their life aside they're "A+" students, not "C+" students...*

A counselor recalled his experience working with a student from an earlier Institute:

*...she was a single parent and worked full time...had a 2.6 GPA...an evaluator at UCI told her that she wasn't university competitive and not to think about this school. When I heard that, I lost it, became unglued, yelled at a lot of people. Finally, she was admitted, probably because she attended SSTI and did very well. Her first quarter, this "noncompetitive UC person" got straight "A's". Her situation was that she was a single parent taking care of her child and her father and working. Therefore, she had a 2.6, but she was at a 4.0 level. We're taking these inherently intelligent kids and making them understand they are top quality.*

Faculty report that they become invested in the long term success of their students. As students continue on, transfer to four-year schools and graduate, faculty experience the power of their work at the Institute. Professor Irene Malmgren describes the impact of hearing from former students:

*They go to Berkeley, UCI, UC, Riverside. Former students send me their graduation announcements, the wall in my office is plastered with them.*

**Redefining the Faculty/Counselor Roles:** Just as students are limited by traditional school experiences, so the faculty complain about the everyday conditions that inhibit excellent teaching. Large classes and fragmented schedules make individual attention difficult, and traditional faculty members often see innovation as threatening. As one teacher put it:

*I was ready to quit teaching before I came to SSTI. I can honestly say that this is the greatest teaching experience of my life.*

In addition to their involvement with students, SSTI serves as a laboratory for faculty, providing the opportunity to talk with other professionals about teaching and learning. Because of this, the

Institute offers tremendous opportunities for professional development. Faculty have experimented with new pedagogies, developed new curricula, and explored new interests. Two faculty members recalled:

*When I first came to SSTI I had never used groups in the classroom. But once I did here I was sold. I went back to the college and found others who also used them. Now it's second nature.*

*I have looked all over for pedagogy and materials for teaching Geology and Oceanography. What I found was that the best stuff was from the grade schools. Most of the material from the high schools is for kids who know they want to be scientists. That is not right for our students, so I have done a lot of adaptation.*

Perhaps most striking was the Psychology teacher, Professor Irene Malmgren, who, after her initial teaching experience at SSTI, returned to UCI to take graduate courses in African-American psychology and Latino psychology. As she notes, "this gave me, as a white teacher, a whole new appreciation of my students." She has drawn on this training to regularly offer special sections of African-American and Latino psychology in the Introductory Psychology course back at Santa Ana College.

Counselors at both Santa Ana College and LA Southwest College also report that their sense of their role has been enriched by their experience in SSTI. By having the opportunity to "get out of the office" and into the classroom, counselors are engaged in continual, proactive contact with students. Because of this, counselors report having a much better sense of what students need. For example, ongoing dialogue is much more effective than routine transfer counseling in picking up on a student's lack of confidence or difficulties with their family. By being in the classroom, counselors have the opportunity to directly influence the educational environment. The counselors at SSTI were unanimous in their enthusiasm for team teaching.

**SSTI Back Home—Support on Campus:** Part of the transformative power of SSTI come from the fact that its impact does not end with the eleven day residential experience, but continues when the students return to their home campus. The bonding that occurs among students and staff leads to the development of both formal and informal networks of support among students, faculty, counseling staff, and administrators, who work together to make transfer a reality for students.

We found evidence of informal networks at all the participating schools, but they are most evident at Santa Ana College, which has the largest critical mass of SSTI graduates. Many individual relationships forged during the Institute tend to last. Students often seek out SSTI professors when they enroll for courses. In a few cases, SSTI graduates are hired by faculty to work as student assistants. The Institute experience makes them ideal for this role, since they have had the experience of group learning and share a commitment to active pedagogies.

The SSTI graduates are also carefully followed by counseling staff. Students routinely seek out the counselors, and, while previously they may have never stayed on campus after class, now they often "hang out" at the transfer center. Because of this ongoing contact, counselors are able to advocate for students, help with transfer and financial aid information, and respond to personal crises. The relationships begun at the Institute become a valuable ongoing resource for students, solidifying the gains made during the summer. As a LA Southwest counselor put it:

*My commitment to them is that when we get back to school I will be their counselor for the duration...I'm locked into them and I will shepherd them when we get back...we have to continue.*

This ongoing contact with staff helps the students become "school-wise," and better able to negotiate educational bureaucracies. They are coached on how to cultivate contacts, research scholarship opportunities, and get accurate information about requirements from the schools they want to attend. As one student described her experience:

*I was born and raised in Santa Ana. I'm the first high school graduate in my family. I'm the oldest, with no older brother or sister to orient me. One thing that I've learned is to go to every single office and ask questions, go to every single counselor and ask questions, meet every single person at EOPS, Financial Aid, the library. When you need help and they're busy, if they know you they'll probably help you.*

Finally, as students learn to successfully "work the system," they become resources for others, further extending the impact of SSTI. Staff have seen SSTI ripple out, as graduates encourage younger siblings to continue their education, and offer advice to their friends. There is a common feeling, expressed by staff and students alike, that SSTI

is a resource not only for the individuals who attend, but for the whole community. As one staff member puts it:

*When we see what goes on here, we project the results out. The students here represent an extra college graduate in over one hundred households that wouldn't have had one...The overall impact on Santa Ana could be terrific. Many of our students want to come back to Santa Ana to teach and contribute to the community.*

One of the students we interviewed echoed that view. When asked about his aspirations for the future, he responded:

*We want to succeed not only for ourselves, but for our families, our friends, our communities, and la raza.*

**Institutional Impact:** SSTI has been a catalyst for change among the participating institutions. It has strengthened connections among all the partners, improving working relationships between the university system and the community colleges, as well as the City of Santa Ana, and the Santa Ana Unified School District. The involvement of two Ford Foundation funded collaborative projects, Santa Ana Networks, and LAPASS, has also enhanced ties among a large number of institutions throughout southern California, bringing many more partners together to plan for student achievement.

The institutional impact has been particularly profound at Santa Ana College. Sara Lundquist, Vice President for Student Services at Santa Ana College, characterizes the relationship between SSTI and the college as evolving from "warfare to truce to professional honors." During the first two years, she notes, the Institute faced considerable skepticism, and some faculty antagonism. SSTI faculty had to justify their involvement to their departments, and in some cases, had to defy department chairs to initially teach in the program. Perhaps the best window on change at Santa Ana is through the eyes of SSTI faculty. Irene Malmgren, who has taught psychology in each of the Institutes, describes the blend of skepticism, resistance, and concern for students at the college that permitted the development of the Institute:

*I've seen a tremendous change. At our college, psychology epitomized the "good old boy" department, the long-term, white male dominated department. We had the second highest failure rate on campus, behind only political science. When I originally came to SSTI, it was*

*not with the support of my department. They did not believe that you could teach students what we needed to teach them in eleven days...but I had earned their respect and I had been teaching part-time for ten years...but buried in all that conservatism was a concern for students. As long as I could frame what I was talking about in terms of student success, then they'd usually walk away, taking a deep breath, but not get in my way.*

At first, SSTI was barely tolerated by the department. As students earned high grades, the suspicion of "grade inflation" was the next hurdle to overcome. But as the students returned to the college with a new enthusiasm for learning and obviously improved skills, her department began to accept the program.

*The students follow us back...and take our courses...They say, "here's a teacher I can trust" and they select your class...then my pass rate started going up, and I got called before the department chair. He laid the percentages out and asked why I was giving so many more passing grades...But when he got my students into the methods course he taught and those students got the "A's" then it was validated that we weren't giving away grades, but the students were earning them. The students did the work for me of building support in the department, they came in and showed what they could do.*

The research methods course is the most advanced class that psychology majors take before transferring. Previously, it had been composed almost exclusively of Anglo students. With the influx of SSTI students enrollment has doubled, and the department now sends a significant number of Latino students on to university, with some continuing to pursue graduate studies in psychology. The influx of SSTI graduates into psychology courses sparked other changes. Professor Malmgren, who, for many years, was a part-time instructor in the department, has been elected Department Chair. At her urging, faculty in psychology have begun to meet to discuss issues of teaching and learning in their courses. They have come to see SSTI as an important element in advancing the mission of the department. As Professor Malmgren notes:

*These discussions come from SSTI because that is where we had a safe place to try things out. I would hear people talk about cooperative learning and I would say, "what does that mean for a psychology class?" But I got a chance to try it and could talk about it practically to my colleagues.*

The experience of the psychology department was repeated in many other departments in less dramatic ways. SSTI became a stimulus for learning about innovative teaching across the campus. The Board of Trustees is kept aware of the program's achievements, the Chancellor recognizes faculty who teach in the Institute, faculty include SSTI teaching on their resumes and promotion dossiers as examples of outstanding contribution, and SSTI faculty routinely tell their colleagues that teaching in the Institute has been the best experience of their professional lives.

SSTI has also served as a model for new program development at the college. The experience of pairing a discipline teacher and a counselor in the classroom, and integrating academics and student support has led to two new programs at the college that emphasize team teaching and the developing of learning communities: the Freshman Experience program and the development of thematic learning communities. As John Nixon, Vice President for Academic Affairs at Santa Ana College, notes:

*SSTI demonstrated the success of the strategy of combining a discipline teacher and counselor together...the faculty and counselors from the Institute have become either participants or proselytizers among peers.*

The Freshman Experience Program is designed for new students who need to improve their basic skills. It pairs a counselor and a Math or English teacher, as well as a Reading teacher to create a basic skills learning cohort. The college now offers 8 sections of 36 students, and is planning to expand the program by establishing it as the standard for all matriculating first year students. The college has also tried to promote learning communities by linking two discipline courses, such as a history class scheduled with another liberal arts course. Such programmatic initiatives have had a significant impact on the culture of the college. Both faculty and administration place much more emphasis on preparation for transfer, and are increasingly reflective about the implications for student transfer as they examine both academic and student support programs.

The college also reaches out to the school district, with mathematics and English/ESL faculty collaborating to revise the 11th and 12th grade curriculum to expand SAT preparation activities and essay writing as part of the college application process. Staff from the college,

the school district, and the University of California, Irvine have also collaborated to develop a summer residential program for high school students held at UCI that is modeled on SSTI. The dramatic increase in Santa Ana's transfer rate to the UC and CSU systems, with student transfer increasing from 411 in 1990 to 639 in 1996, has produced a sea-change in the perception of the college by other institutions, and has significantly improved its relationship with the University of California, Irvine. According to Juan Francisco Lara, Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services at UCI:

*When we began, the perception by UCI was that Santa Ana had the characteristics of a low-performing, urban community college: low expectations, poor counseling, questionable quality of instruction, few students transferring...a vocational institution not really concerned with transfer education...this began to change after the first year when SSTI students met with UCI admissions counselors...After that there was the view that there were some very fine students here.*

Dr. Lara stresses the importance of SSTI in promoting the almost complete change in the perception of Santa Ana College. The institutional collaboration brought the staffs from the community college and the university together, helping them get a more realistic sense of one another, and of their students. The image of Santa Ana now is as "a center of academic excellence where students can achieve and move forward." Dr. Lara, in reflecting on the impact of the collaboration, makes the point that:

*Most attempts to improve the image of the urban community college haven't been negotiated on the ground through a collaborative focused on students going to select universities. Here is a case of changing an image so that the community college can become a magnet for underrepresented students who want to go to selective universities.*

This dramatic alteration in perception has led to a number of changes in institutional policy and practice. UCI regularly supplies a staff member to supervise the residential needs of the students at the Institute, as well as transfer counselors to meet with each student individually. Santa Ana has been integrated into the UCI electronic network, so that students can apply for admission on-line. UCI admissions counselors have been given a "hot list" of SSTI graduates interested in admission. This permits paperwork to be carefully tracked, and problems can be quickly resolved by Santa Ana and UCI staff. A Santa Ana counselor notes the new relationship with the university:

*There's open communication between the staffs now...people can pick up the phone if there's a problem.*

A UCI administrator describes the situation from the university's side:

*There was a student who came in January and applications had closed for the year. Isaac Guzman brought her up and said, "this girl has enough units, she just missed the deadline. What can we do?"...We got her paperwork together and approved her late application...she has now graduated from UCI and is out there teaching in the Santa Ana Unified schools...If students are on the cusp we'll probably admit them, because...we know they've performed...that they're a good bet...*

Finally, SSTI has had an impact on the city of Santa Ana as well. Santa Ana is the urban center of Orange County, and it faces a variety of challenges. A city of 330,000, it has the second largest Hispanic population in the country. The school district serves approximately 50,000 children, with almost 85 percent speaking a language other than English at home, and over 70 percent eligible for free meals at school. However, the city has focused on education as the basis for its economic development plan, expressed in its logo "Education First." One strategy is to provide a scholarship program for high school graduates, the Santa Ana 2000 Scholarship. As Lorraine Lazarine, Council Services Manager, notes, "Most of our kids go to high school, but they need to continue their education. We think a lot about how to help them." SSTI has been significant to the city, serving as a symbol of the success that Latino students can achieve when they are provided high-quality educational programs. Collaborating on the Institute each summer has brought Santa Ana College and UCI into a closer relationship with the city government and the Santa Ana Unified School District. This experience has deepened trust and understanding among the partners, permitting many other collaborative ventures. One recent example is the Community Outreach Partnership Centers Program (COPC), funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This program represents a partnership among Santa Ana College, UCI, the City of Santa Ana, the local school district, and two community-based organizations. It promotes community capacity building among low-income immigrant families by linking housing development, workforce preparation, education, and child care.

## LESSONS LEARNED: COLLABORATING TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR UNDERSERVED STUDENTS

A variety of important lessons have been learned from this five year experiment in promoting access and student academic achievement:

1. **Identifying a Critical Transition.** SSTI demonstrates how to maximize the impact of an innovative program by working with students at a critical transition point in their educational careers. By selecting students after they have completed 30 credits at a community college, the Institute optimizes its ability to promote student transformation. The Institute strengthens academic skills and raises aspirations at a point when students still have time to explore transfer options and complete their general education coursework. Thus, it maximizes its ability to take underrepresented students competitively eligible for a selective university system.

2. **Promoting Student Transformation.** The Institute is able to prepare underserved, at-risk students for university admission by functioning as a laboratory for learning. Participants have approached their work in an honest spirit of inquiry. They have used the Institute to explore the question of what "average" community college students who have experienced little prior success in school can achieve if the usual constraints of their life are removed and they are provided a high-quality educational program. During the past five years staff have identified a range of practices and program features that have the greatest impact on students. The practices that promote student transformation include:

- an exclusive focus on academics
- intensity and quality of time on task
- a blending of challenge and support
- continuous feedback to students
- linking academics and student services
- attention to emotional dynamics and diversity issues
- providing a steady stream of positive images of the future
- offering students opportunities to try out new identities

2. **The Transformative Classroom.** By providing faculty with a safe and supportive environment to experiment, SSTI has helped teachers develop many examples of academically powerful pedagogies and curricula. Common features across the various disciplines are

courses that blend academic rigor, intensity of effort, support, and collaborative learning. Staff have also learned the value of linking academics and support services by teaming a faculty member and a counselor.

The decision to offer standard general education courses is important, since the participating faculty can provide colleagues at their home institutions with concrete examples of ways to strengthen the range of general education classes taken by all transfer-oriented students. In this way, SSTI further maximizes the impact of a small, innovative program, by demonstrating how to promote high quality teaching and learning in the average classroom.

4. **Collegial Faculty Development.** The faculty uniformly report that the Institute has been the most significant experience of their professional lives. Faculty express the sense of being revitalized in their teaching, and of mastering a range of pedagogical strategies that they can take back to their regular classes. However, the programmatic features that have promoted such substantial faculty development are not restricted to a summer program. Faculty all identify the importance of team teaching and the presence of another professional in the classroom, a collegial setting with other staff available to discuss teaching, close contact with the students, and an environment that supports risk and experimentation. While all these features have been carefully nurtured at SSTI, they are quite capable of being transplanted to other educational settings. SSTI offers a powerful model of collegial professional development that should be considered by any school concerned with strengthening its academic program.
5. **Proactive Student Services.** Teaming a counselor with a faculty member in the classroom promotes proactive student services. Rather than the traditional, reactive model of waiting for students to seek services, the counselors at SSTI have developed a number of strategies for the early identification of student problems and concerns. The Institute offers a new model of student services for nontraditional, at-risk students, and provides many examples of practices to encourage students to actively seek support and engage in transfer planning.
6. **Institutional Collaboration.** SSTI is perhaps most important as a model of regional institutional collaboration to promote student transfer and academic achievement. During a time when the

University of California system is dismantling its traditional affirmative action programs, SSTI is a model of a highly effective transition program promoting access and academic achievement. It further offers the critically important lesson that an innovative program, to remain effective and be sustained over time, requires ongoing institutional collaboration. The collaboration to develop and sustain the Institute has also promoted a variety of spin-offs and unintended consequences that have extended its impact far beyond what a small program could normally expect to achieve. By concentrating on what they do best, teaching and learning, and carefully assessing their efforts, the partners have moved, as one participant put it, "from formal treaties to full collaboration." This has been facilitated by growing levels of trust and understanding among the partners as they have learned to negotiate problems created by the differences in each other's organizational cultures and missions. Now, after five years of work, SSTI provides a comprehensive model of regional collaboration than can be adapted throughout California, as well as other states concerned with promoting transfer among underserved students.

## A Note on Method

The authors conducted participant observation research at the 1997 Summer Scholars Transfer Institution. Research included observing a large sample of classes, study groups, and other informal activities, as well as a review of program reports and documents. Interviews were conducted with the director, support staff, faculty, counselors, and students. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded.

During the 1996-1997 academic year Dr. Dennis McGrath and Dr. James Valadez conducted a study of Santa Ana Networks, which provided data on the collaborative dimensions of the Institute. This research included attending a strategic planning retreat, reviewing proposals and planning documents, as well as interviews with the team leader and members of the operating committee and executive committee. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of the partner institutions—teachers, staff, and administrators from Santa Ana College and the University of California, Irvine, the City Manager and the Council Services Manager of the City of Santa Ana, administrators from the Santa Ana Unified School District, as well as representatives from Santa Ana 2000 and the STEP project.

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